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CURRENT OPINION

Roman Catholic Theology and the Bible

That the Roman church has drifted on the sea of dogma too far from biblical moorings is the contention of a Roman ecclesiastic in a recently published article. Under the interrogatory title "Why Divorce Our Teaching of Theology from Our Teaching of the Bible?" Rev. Hugh Pope, O.P., of the Collegio Angelico, Rome, contributes to the January number of the *Irish Theological Quarterly*. The Roman Catholic theological system rests upon the Bible as interpreted by the church. Of these two elements, the Bible is the less necessary; so much so that St. Irenaeus could say that a knowledge of the written word was not necessary to salvation. Hence it is that when once the church has systematized her teaching, we can dispense with the Bible and listen to the living voice alone. And there can be no question but that the amount of positive theological teaching which the ordinary ecclesiastical student has to digest and assimilate during his course, leaves very little room for investigation of the sources from which that teaching is derived. He wants results, not critical investigations, and his bishop wants him as soon as he can get him.

Is it necessary, or rather, is it right, that we should so completely divorce our teaching of theology from our teaching of the Bible? No one will dispute the fact that these courses are so divorced. We see the effect of this in the way in which the Bible is handled in our manuals of theology; texts are cited in support of doctrines, and yet how often their bearing upon the doctrine in question is highly disputable. In some cases, indeed, these citations can only provoke the merriment of the exegete. The majority of theological professors do not expound the arguments drawn from

Scripture, because they are afraid to handle them. They are insufficiently trained in exegesis, and, if they do not happen to be *au courant* with the trend of modern thought on the question, they are, with justice, afraid lest they should get beyond their depth. And if they are not aware of the difficulties, the effects are often worse, as in the case of the professor who felt a not unnatural difficulty when discussing the share of the serpent in the story of the Fall; after hedging for some time, he at length laid down that the students, whatever they did with the serpent, must at least allow that it was in the neighborhood, probably up a tree!

Our professors are the victims of circumstances. They have never had the requisite training. This not only weakens their exposition of doctrine; it leads them to an uneasy feeling of distrust when they have to deal with biblical exegesis. "You exeges," said a professor of theology recently, "are terrible people. You have begun by whittling away inspiration till it seems to mean just nothing at all, and now you have so emasculated some of the dogmatic texts upon which we have been wont to base our theological teaching, that we are afraid to use them lest we should be told that they had been long ago shown to be unauthentic." No modern scholar would dream of questioning the value of the Vulgate. But while acknowledging its merits as a version, it would be idle to deny that it has its defects. What the Council of Trent did in reference to this matter was to declare that of all the Latin versions, the Vulgate was the one to be held "authentic"; that it was immaculate was never held for a moment. Yet to many the translation of the Hebrew original into Latin by St. Jerome marked the last step in biblical exegesis; the Hebrew text had been once and for all rendered into

Latin and there was no need for further investigation. When the delicate question of the historicity of certain portions of the Bible is broached—then the theologians are up in arms! But they are uneasily conscious that they are not quite sure of their ground amidst the hail of texts and Hebrew which the exegetes hurl at them.

If both parties had in common a sound knowledge of the Bible and an adequate acquaintance with Hebrew, there would probably be no interchange of opprobrious terms but an equitable discussion of the whole matter—with resulting confusion of the exegete. Moreover, by such discussion we should falsify such gloomy anticipations as are voiced in the words of a well-known theologian who remarked a short time back: "We are on the verge of a terrible crisis in the church and this simply because the theologians are secretly afraid of the exegetes, while the exegetes despise the theologians." What is to be done? Clearly the exegete must become a theologian and the theologian must become an exegete. What the ecclesiastical student needs is an introduction to critical methods of handling the Old Testament; he must be taught how to treat a text. When this principle is in force, and is producing fruits, the present state of strain will cease.

Heresy Trials in Germany

The most significant event in German ecclesiastical life in 1912, according to Caspar René Gregory, the well-known American professor in Leipzig, was the church trial in Cologne of Pastor Traub, one of the defenders in a previous trial of Pastor Jatho.

Gregory sets forth this view in an open letter published in *Faith and Doubt* for March. Jatho was tried for expounding liberal views by the *Oberkirchenrat*, the highest ecclesiastical court in the Prussian church, and condemned. Traub, as one of his defenders, is said to have used vehement language in the presence of the court and

was cited to trial for the offense. The case against Traub was conducted by Herr Voigts, a lawyer, president of the court. Voigts and the court, according to Gregory, "covered themselves with infamy legally and technically speaking by condemning Traub unheard" and without even giving him a chance to learn who his accuser was. The sentence passed upon Traub was that he be excluded from the church, be put out of the ministry, that he be deprived of his pension, and that the title of pastor be taken away. The sentence, states Professor Gregory, was "infamous."

Professor Gregory describes the men brought to trial as follows: Jatho was "full of religion and full of Christianity." Of Traub he says: "If there is anything true of Traub it is his directness, manliness, uprightness. There is not a crooked fiber in his nature."

Recent Questionings

William Benjamin Smith, writing under the above caption in the new magazine *Faith and Doubt* has in substance the following to say, relative to the explanation of the meaning and place of Christianity in history: The main effort of the past century to explain Christianity as the reaction upon history of a single personality, most extraordinary, but still perfectly natural and intelligible human character, has issued in failure. The historical critics, while admitting any amount of the divine everywhere in the universe in the whole nature process, yet argue, the divine can be understood only as expressed in history in terms of the human or at least the natural, and have felt themselves obliged to use nothing but humanity in their construction of proto-Christianity. The net result has been failure. Modern criticism has shown the impossibility of the problem as one of individual psychology, by showing that the problem is indeed psychologic but the psychology is social. We must turn

for illuminative facts, fertile suggestions, and sure-leading clews in searching for the seeds of things Christian and proto-Christian to the wide field of history, ethnology, and philology, as well as theology.

Reitzenstein, in his *Poimandros*, his *Hellenistische Wundererzaehlungen*, and his *Hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, has massed a large amount of evidence for a strong strain of Hellenism and mystery cult in the four so-called accepted Pauline epistles. But Schweitzer in his recent work on *Paul and His Interpreters* attacks this position, claiming that the irradiating ray of Paul's thought, his ethics, all his efforts and phraseology, is from late Jewish eschatology. But Schweitzer's reply is inadequate, says W. B. Smith; there is no incompatibility between late Jewish eschatology and Hellenistic mystery-elements. But the fact is that a doctrine that so glorified the Jew and promised him world-dominion found little favor in his eyes but ready acceptance among the Gentiles. There is reasonable certainty that there were powerful Hellenistic elements in the propaganda that appealed so irresistibly to the Hellenic world. Reitzenstein tips the scale of evidence toward there being a weighty Hellenic factor in the Christian movement from the start, especially Antioch and Alexandrian elements as it appears at least in the apostle. But neither Reitzenstein nor Schweitzer seems to give sufficient consideration to the fact that, along with the new, the old problem still asserts itself in undiminished importance and interest. The net result is that the question has only acquired added interest and significance. Nevertheless a sympathetic optimism can detect a sensible advance toward a satisfactory comprehension of the origins of Christianity.

The Christian Pastor and Biblical Criticism

The effect of biblical criticism upon the Christian minister is considered from the

Anglican point of view, in the April *Hibbert Journal*, by Rev. Hubert Handley, vicar of St. Thomas' Church in London. The peculiar hope of the liberal clergyman in the church of England is that of saving religion for his conservative opponents. He is clerically unpopular, and is subjected, at the hands of his fellow-clergy, to quiet, conscientious, immutable repugnance and depreciation. His chief trials are loneliness and the antipathy of good men. But he believes that he is serving his detractors in spite of themselves; that for many an English Christian home he is breaking the shock of startling critical disclosures; and that he is bearing the critical cross ahead for the sake of his fellow-pilgrims.

Criticism has left the Bible in the Christian pastor's hand as a treasury of supreme religious experience; but it has taken the Bible away from the Christian pastor as a weapon of infallible reference. Exact sayings, exact deeds, may, many of them, be slipping out of the pastor's reach, may one after another be silently passing beyond the frontiers of historical certainty into the vast surrounding regions of the dimly known, or the vaguely surmised, or the mythically narrated. But the great, central, saving *facts*, e.g., the passion of our Lord, survive that exit and dispersion; they stand up more than ever sharply prominent and fixed. And the great, vital, spiritual *words*, issuing from the depths of the souls of the seers—for us Christians, issuing in ultimate disclosures from the depths of the soul of our Savior: these luminous and mighty utterances, charged with command and destiny, strangely adequate to the heart's desire, corroborated from age to age in their religious validity; these words, proof against critical corrosives, are found, we think, to tell the abiding secrets of the Eternal. That is biblical criticism.

The different forms of pastoral work are differently affected by criticism. In administering the sacraments, the specific task of

the critical pastor is to help in gradually weeding out from those services of his church statements or implications which affront modern knowledge. In sacramental service, the individuality of the pastor, however, dwindles almost away, and the power of the institution rules the imagination and the facts. In the services themselves, he is the mere organ of society. Likewise, in the morning or evening prayer, in the marriage office, in the burial of the dead, the minister voices the spirit of the Christian centuries which breathes through the liturgy. He must, indeed, strive to purge the consecrated utterance of anachronisms, and to make it the living tongue of Christendom. Yet his first duty here is to harness himself to the existing formulas of piety. And so, in most of the conventional religious functions, the critical pastor is like his conservative brother. He teaches the young, visits the sick, counsels the distressed of heart or soul, stands by the dying. In these situations, it is not the critical, but the *spiritual*, temperament which tells.

In the ministry of preaching, however, the work of the critical pastor is more characteristic. The reaction of his auditors varies according to their culture. The effect of criticism in the preaching of a Christian pastor among the educated classes is to make him more effective and acceptable. This rule, however, is impaired by two exceptions. On the one hand, the hard, established orthodox scent destruction; the rivets of the ark are giving way; the planks are parting; and unknown waters yawn. Where are we? Where are the old securities? "Where," cries the High Churchman, "are 'definite Church teaching' and 'the first six Geneva councils'?" "Where," cries the Low Churchman, "is 'the language of Zion'?" The fixed and satisfied orthodox, then, on

the one side, break the rule that the educated classes incline to a critical evangel. On the other side, the rule is also broken by the offended and absent heterodox. These do not go to church. They are by no means irreligious; but their spiritual thirst is not slaked by the aridities often held to their lips from the Anglican pulpit. And so these average Englishmen, thoughtful and numerous, renounce all the pastors, critical and conservative alike. The exceptions modify, but do not annul, the rule that among educated people biblical criticism enhances the virtue of the preacher.

Among uneducated people, conditions are different. Biblical criticism here is a non-conductor. A working-class audience craves doctrinal color and detail which the critical preacher cannot supply. In the huge structure of theology, he is concerned with the foundations, which he knows to be secure; they prefer the pinnacles, which he sees to be tottering. In the long run, however, only the religious temper, only spirituality tells. That, in our day of transition, is the critical pastor's hope. At heart, the people want religion, not words. If, in the name of Christ, and in essential continuity with the inherited Christian experience of the Eternal, the critical pastor, himself inwardly religious, offers to the people true religion, then the people will recognize it, even though to them the language be strange and the messenger uncongenial. *Reality knows Reality.*

Note

The many friends of Professor Edouard von Dobschütz will be interested to know that on April 1, 1913, he became professor of New Testament in the University of Halle. His address is Advokatenweg 4.